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ABSTRACT

This journal issue concentrates on the theme "Parents and Reading." It presents articles on sharing books with young children, using public relations in a reading program, guiding preschool learning, assessing language readiness, working with reading problems, and teaching reading readiness in Wisconsin kindergartens. Resources and a review of professional materials are also provided. (RL)

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THE LAP TECHNIQUE: The Benefits of Sharing Books With Young Children

by

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"What can I do to help my child learn how to read?" is a question parents of young children frequently ask teachers. The question reflects a deep concern on the part of parents for their child's success when introduced to formal reading instruction. It is a question that deserves attention.

Parents are our most important resource for developing a child's readiness for formal reading instruction. They have available to them a deceptively simple but powerful sharing technique. It is the "lap technique." It involves setting aside twenty or thirty minutes each evening for curling up in a comfortable chair or couch with their child or children nestled on their laps or snuggled in close. As the child sits safely and securely in this loving environment the stories and poems shared with her or him assume important value. The child grows to respect and appreciate books and reading.

In the remainder of this article, guides will be presented on selecting reading material for sharing with children. Second, the benefits of the lap technique and some specific ideas for ways to read aloud to children by actively involving them in the experience will be discussed.

Selecting the Books

Expose the child to a wide variety of books. Alphabet books, nursery rhymes, poetry, fairy tales, stories about children of the same age, basic concept books, easy-to-read books, wordless picture books, realistic stories, animal stories, stories about minorities, stories which show men and women in varying roles, non-fiction and Caldecott Medal books are some of the most important reading materials available to young children. Often parents limit selection to fairy tales, one ABC book and a few nursery rhymes. However, our libraries and bookstores are rich with a wide variety of materials to capture and stimulate children's interests. Sharing all types of books from this bountiful array of children's books helps children grow in their knowledge of the world, language, and the multidimensionality of reading. Books are an excellent medium for vicarious experience. Children can travel to the world of imagination, the world of science, the world of their emotions, and the world of fascinating people and events. Librarians are an invaluable resource in helping parents locate excellent books on a variety of topics.

Allow the children to own books. Whether the books are paperbacks from a discount store, or the more expensive hardback books is not important. What is important is that the children have a few books that they possess. These are books that they have immediate access to. They become the well loved, frequently handled, and dog-eared books of frequent companionship and thus part of their daily lives. For very young children, these could be the simple cloth books or cardboard books designed especially for them. For older children, it is especially beneficial for them to own a few books that are favorite stories. This becomes a foundation for a lifetime love affair with books.

Develop the library experience. Even toddlers can accompany parents to the library and select a few books they would like parents to read to them. By involving children in the selection process, parents communicate their respect for children's specific interests. As parents observe what children select, they can determine what other kinds of books to add to the book experience. Children also develop very strong, positive feelings about something if they are allowed to be actively involved with it.

Benefits and Implementation of the "Lap Technique"

Learning to visually identify and name letters of the alphabet. In sharing different types of alphabet books with children, parents can encourage them to name the letters as the pages are turned. Children can also begin to identify the names of the objects on the page which correspond to the alphabet letter. Some children will be able to go a step farther and begin to develop an ability to associate the beginning letter of the object on the page with its sound by the repeated exposure to alphabet materials. As parents read alphabet books to children and repeat their readings of these materials, they can gradually reduce the amount of actual reading they do and increase the child's "reading" or telling of the alphabet book. Much of the child's early "reading" of alphabet books will be based on memory for the picture associations. However, the child will gradually come to recognize the letters and name them. Parents will know that the child has learned letter names when they see the child identify these same letters in new places such as on road signs.

Certainly children learn something--the alphabet--as these books are shared with them. However, it is vitally important to keep the book sharing, appreciation, and enjoyment of the experience primary. This is not a time to force and aggressively push the child to learn. It is important to keep the atmosphere loving and supportive as children are allowed to enjoy the books and gradually learn at the same time.

Learning the physical features of books. Early handling and possession of books allow children to explore their special features. Two books which are especially delightful in encouraging children to explore the characteristics of books are There's a Monster at the End of this Book (Stone, 1971) and Would you Like to Play HIDE and SEEK in This Book With Lovable, Furry Old Grover? (Stone, 1976). Both books feature the Sesame Street character, Grover, playing with the physical features of the book. Grover's play encourages the child to develop some understanding of book concepts such as first page and last page, front to back sequencing, right side up orientation, left to right sequencing, tops and bottoms of pages, and print and picture discrimination. As parents read these books to children, the

child should be encouraged to hold the books and show that they know how to turn the pages as the story develops. Parents could discuss these physical features as the story is read. For example, "Grover says he is going to hide at the top of the page. Where is the top of the page?" On the surface, these considerations seem very simple. They are simple for the experienced book handler but they are a puzzle for those who have not had book experience.

Learning rhyme. Children delight in the sounds of their language. Even after they have begun to talk, children can be observed to play and experiment with language sounds in their speech. By sharing nursery rhymes and poetry, parents will be guiding children to another way of experiencing their language. Mother Goose favorites should be read over and over so that they are naturally committed to memory. Parents will know that children are beginning to develop the understanding of rhyme when they observe them repeating favorite rhymes in free play. After the children have several rhymes in their memory, it is fun to play a game of "fractured nursery rhymes." This is done by saying a familiar rhyme to children and purposely substituting a wrong rhyming word. For example, "Hey Diddle, Diddle, The cat in the mustard." As children correct parents, they are showing sensitivity to the rhyme form as well as to the content of the poems. All of this process is part of auditory discrimination discussed frequently in reading readiness materials.

Expanding vocabulary and language. Children will not know all of the vocabulary words in all of the stories read aloud. Nor will children speak all of the sentence structures that are presented. This is good. We do not always want to present children with only things they already know. By presenting books with a few new words and harder sentences, the children can grow in their knowledge of the English language which, in turn, will increase their ability to handle these same features when it comes to reading on their own. Children will come to expect that written language should say something similar to what is spoken. This knowledge of the relationship between written and spoken language will also strengthen their ability to learn how to read.

Learning the characteristics of stories. Observations of children have shown that when they handle books on their own, one of the first responses to stories is pointing to pictures and labeling them with their names. Next, children will begin to say a short sentence about individual pictures. At this stage, children treat each individual picture in a story as unrelated to the next picture. Each picture is a new event. Children demonstrate that they are able to link the events of a story when they can connect each of the pictured events by looking at the pictures and telling the story or retelling a familiar story without the presence of the book. The reading of books to children is essential to development of this ability to integrate the elements of a story into a unified whole. By hearing many stories, children have examples or models from which to develop this learning. Clearly, children who cannot integrate the elements of a story will have difficulty comprehending stories in formal reading instruction.

It is through the example of many stories that children come to understand the relationship of character, plot, and setting. Children who are developing this sensitivity, for example, will be very upset if the parent were to stop reading "The Three Little Pigs" when the wolf is huffing and puffing outside the door of the third little pig. These children know that the plot must continue and reach some kind of conclusion. The child who has not developed sensitivity to story structure, on the other hand, would accept an adult comment, "That's the end." However, if the child can see that there are more pages in the book, the child might say, "Read all the pages."

There are several types of books and story structures that are especially supportive of the learning process just described. First are rhyming stories such as the popular easy-to-read books written by Dr. Suess (Theodore Geisel). The frantic efforts of Sam to resist eating Green Eggs and Ham (Geisel, 1960) are depicted in a rhyming story which children delight in hearing over and over to the extent that they begin to memorize parts. The rhyming structure of the story assists them in learning the story: "That Sam I am, That Sam I am! I do not like Green Eggs and Ham! I would not eat them here or there! I would not eat them anywhere!" It is a joy to parents to see their children reach the

point where the story is known so well that the children actually appear to be reading the book on their own. Children can be observed synchronizing the turning of the pages with their recitation of the memorized story.

To assist children in memorizing a story, it must be read aloud numerous times. Usually children lead the way by letting parents know what book or books they would like to hear read over and over. Parents may feel that this is time wasted, but it is not. The children are possessing the story--making it their own. When reading rhyming stories aloud to children, parents can begin to involve the child in the reading by stopping just before a rhyming word and letting the child fill it in. For example, "That Sam I am! That Sam I am! I do not like green eggs and _____!" Children should be gradually encouraged to fill in more and more of the story.

A second feature in stories for young children which supports their learning of story structure is the cumulative story. As these stories build, first one character appears and then another and another and so on. In Ask Mr. Bear (Flack, 1932), Danny wants to obtain a birthday present for his mother. First, he asks the hen, who cannot help him, but the hen goes along with him to ask the next character, a goose. The goose can't help him either but wants to go along. "So Danny and the Hen and the Goose all hopped along until they met _____". As this line is repeated in the story with the addition of each new character, children can be invited to chime in with the reading. In this way the children are responding to the sequential structure of the story. Children can also be encouraged to guess what animal will appear next. In understanding the setting of the story, they are sure to guess another farm animal, not a jungle animal.

A third story feature is the refrain. Refrains are little poems or sometimes phrases which are repeated at points throughout the story. "Cats here, cats there, cats and kittens everywhere. Hundreds of cats, Thousands of cats, Millions and billions and trillions of cats" is a refrain which is repeated in the story Millions of Cats (Gag, 1928). When refrains and repeated phrases appear in stories, parents can pause a moment to cue the child to join in with the reading of the story by repeating the refrain or phrase with them. Not only does this allow

responding to the structure of the story but it also encourages the children to try out new sentence structures and vocabulary which help them expand their facility with language.

Stories which encourage prediction of the next story event are also excellent. Many children's authors know that children love to play the guessing game. What can it be? What will happen next? Rosie's Walk (Hutchins, 1968) is a book that encourages the children to predict. Rosie, the hen, is being chased by a fox who has chicken dinner on his mind. Each time he is ready to pounce on Rosie, there are clues in the picture about what is going to happen to the fox next. Children will enjoy guessing what will happen before turning the page. Usually, they are able to guess correctly and feel particularly smug when they turn the page to see that they are correct.

As parents search for good stories containing rhyme, or cummulative structure, or refrains, or prediction, they will often find that these elements are combined in a single book. Such is the case in Ellen Raskin's Who, Said Sue, Said Whoo? (Raskin, 1968). The story begins with a cow hiding in a corn field and a little girl turning her head saying, "Who said Moo?" When the page is turned for the answer, the cow comes out of hiding and the next sound is heard. "The polka dot cow said moo. Then who, said Sue, said chitter-chitter-chatter, and who said whoo?" The story is also a guessing game as the reader or listener tries to figure out who makes the sound and will be added to the group of congregating creatures.

Learning to tell stories. Once children have learned to listen to stories, they will delight in telling their own for the many charming wordless picture books available. I observed a five year old sitting with a tape recorder, microphone in hand, for one hour telling an elaborate story for Shrewbettina's Birthday (Goodall, 1971). When she was finished with the telling, she replayed her story and listened as she turned the pages of the wordless picture book. It was clear from her storytelling that she knew how a story developed. She gave her characters life and animation through conversation and action. Their personalities were further developed through her description of their emotions and thoughts. Frequently, a child's telling of a story

for a wordless picture book incorporates bits of story plot or language borrowed from a story the child has been read, showing that stories are becoming part of his or her daily life. Children may enjoy alternating the telling page by page with the parent. A lively dimension can be given to the experience by giving the characters conversation. Books by Mercer Mayer have been very popular favorite wordless picture books with children. In a number of his books, a frog is featured as the main character. The mischevious and loving behavior of the frog portrayed through the animated humorous illustrations are especially captivating in A Boy, A Dog, and a Frog (Mayer, 1967), Frog On His Own (Mayer, 1972), and Frog Goes to Dinner (Mayer, 1974).

Implementation of the suggestions presented here will do much to assist children in developing a strong readiness for formal reading instruction and a love for books. These are some of the greatest gifts parents can bring to their children.

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Quoted From

Baughman's Handbook of Humor in Education
by M. Dale Baughman
Parker Publishing Company, Inc.
West Nyack, New York

Here are some SIXTH-GRADE SLIP-UPS: (page 153)

Describe the circulation of the blood. Answer: It flows down one leg and up the other.

The spinal colum is a long bunch of bones. The head sits on top and you sit on the bottom.

To prevent a head cold, use an agonizer to spray nose until it drops into your throat.

How do bacteria reproduce? They multiply then divide.

In the spring the salmon ascends fresh water to spoon.

What kind of a noun is trousers? Answer: an uncommon noun because it is singular at the top and plural at the bottom.

Editor

PR: How To Use It For Your Reading Program

by

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A first grade teacher marks the date when one of her pupils reads a complete passage without any errors. A year later on the same date this teacher sends the second grader a "Reading Birthday" card to the child's home.

This gesture is simple, but highly significant. Why? Because it demonstrates a caring and thoughtful attitude on the part of the teacher. Such a practice is well-received by children and parents and reinforces the good that is education. It also has value from a public relations point of view.

Presently a whole host of problems face education. The leadership role of helping to shape the future of education must fall to educators. It is they who have the direct responsibility for not only the educational program, but also for its public support.

There's one priority that tends to be overlooked. That is the need to establish a sound public relations program. The best public relations program, however, is no match for the recalcitrant and often irrational attitudes that twelve years of schooling has built. Schools must first have a quality product. Public relations is a conscientious effort to tell the school story in ways which promote an understanding of the purposes of the schools' methods of education and their existing needs.

Among other phases of school activities, the reading program is perhaps the most meaningful and potent vehicle for fostering positive public attitudes, especially parental attitudes about schools in general. Since reading is the one skill that parents are most eager to have their children master at the very beginning of their schooling, it is the most logical place for the most effective public relations program.

A sound public relations program can be implemented easily and with minimal or no costs. This article describes succinctly actual activities conducted as part of a public relations campaign in the New Haven public school system's reading program.

1. Communications--Like so many school systems, New Haven uses a basal reading program as a major vehicle for reading instruction. In conjunction with its use, several types of material have been prepared by members of the Reading Department, and sent home for parental interaction. At the pre-reading level, a mimeographed bulletin is sent home which informs the parent which letters and sounds the child has learned, the technique used, and offers specific suggestions on how they can reinforce these sounds. The last sheet includes a reproduction of the magic pictures used in the program with a sample flash card.

After the child finishes the first three preprimers of the program, additional stories which reinforce the vocabulary learned with accompanying questions are sent home. A covering letter encourages the parent to take the time to hear his or her child read the material, to praise the child's accomplishments, and to keep in close contact with the school as to be informed of progress at subsequent reading levels.

A Homework Resource Activities Booklet has also been prepared and distributed to city teachers. This booklet contains examples of games and other exercises which teachers can use to send home as homework activities. These homework activities are used not only to reinforce skills but also as a tool for involving parents as learning partners in the education of their children.

Friday folders are another means of providing information to parents. The week's work is saved, put into a folder and sent home on Friday with comments either on some of the daily work or a general comment about the week's progress.

Annotated graded lists of recommended books for parents to use as guides when using the public library facilities are sent home periodically. A "Summer Reading List" has also been prepared, as well as a Xmas List which consists of not only suggestions for gifts of games and books but also their prices and the names of local stores where they can be purchased.

Many schools are also initiating "Good News" phone calls regarding a child's progress or accomplishments. Parents appreciate these calls as they are often contacted only when there is "bad" news.

2. Parent Tutors and Aides--Volunteer aides and tutors can be an indispensable part of the reading program. Their services provide additional resources for children. New Haven has recruited inner-city parents, called Community Tutors, to tutor intermediate grade children eight hours per week. They are paid from funds raised from a local foundation grant. Parents also work as instructional aides in the Title I Focus program, presently operating in New Haven's twenty inner-city schools.

New Haven's Office of School Volunteers has recruited 100 urban and suburban parents as reading tutors. It has also organized a Talent Bank. Citizens who have interesting occupations or experiences visit classrooms to talk to children about them. Whether the visitor has lived in China, visited a Buddhist shrine or lived on an Indian reservation, these talks enliven and enrich learning for children. The program also conveys the idea that there is an open door policy for the schools.

3. Be My Guest Program--Several New Haven schools have instituted Be My Guest sessions during the morning hours. Since some parents cannot attend evening meetings, they are invited to visit classrooms in the morning to observe the reading program in action. Babysitting provisions are made while parents are visiting the classrooms.

Parents are encouraged to visit any classrooms they wish since no classrooms are "Off limits." At the conclusion of their visits to the classrooms, they assemble for an informal coffee hour with the principal, reading specialist and other school personnel to discuss their observations and to raise any questions they have concerning reading.

New parents visitations are also an effective public relations policy. As a small number of recent new families accumulates, they are invited to the school for a general overview and classroom observations followed by refreshments and discussion.

4. Reading Advisory Board--A Reading Advisory Board, composed of six classroom teachers and four parents, has been formed in New Haven to review all aspects of the reading program and to develop plans for its improvement. The Board meets periodically to draft new proposals and recommendations.

Occasionally the Board invites representatives of the educational hierarchy and community to review the proposals. One specific proposal made by the Board was to send letters to parents of children who were having reading difficulties encouraging them to enroll their youngsters in summer school for extra reading help. This recommendation was accepted and put into action.

The Reading Advisory Board draws upon the insights and support of school and community representatives. It is effective because it fosters meaningful involvement on the part of the school and community in designing a topflight reading program.

5. Right to Read Program--If public relations is to be a viable effort, teachers and administrators must also feel good about their reading program. As part of Connecticut's Title II Right to Read program, teachers have been submitting proposals for "mini grants." These grants are funded for $1,500 on a competitive basis. The major thrust of these grants is on ways to motivate children to read. Creativity is the essence of these grants and the use of media is emphasized.

Since the program's inception five years ago, New Haven has been awarded 54 grants, a leader in the State. There is no price tag on creativity and there

are many elements of these grants which all teachers can use in their classroom reading programs to spark pupil interest. With this view in mind, ten grants were selected and a filmstrip was made. Each grant was allocated three minutes and while the filmstrip is being viewed, the voice of the recipient is heard explaining the content and conduct of the grant.

Current plans are to show this filmstrip to PTA's and various business and community groups. Also as part of this program, free time was solicited and obtained from the local television station, WTNH-TV, to air several ten minute spots aimed at stressing the importance of reading to parents.

These spots were prepared by members of the Reading Department. They are shown against a backdrop of reading scenes taken at various city schools. The following are four of the types of spots aired:

"An inexpensive and lasting pleasure is reading. Read to your child."

"Have you taken your children to the library this week?"

"Children have the right to read. Help them exercise this right."

"Reading to your child is a nice way to say "I love you."

6. Chapel Mall Exhibit--Recently all 600 elementary teachers in New Haven received a free, twelve-page booklet entitled "50 Ways to Raise Bookworms." (Houghton Mifflin)

Sixth grade teachers selected one idea from the booklet to use as a class project: book trees, dioramas, murals, posters and mobiles. Free window space was secured in a large store in the Chapel Square Mall, a large downtown shopping complex. Two large bookworms made from colored construction paper with the words "We're Raising Bookworms in the New Haven Public Schools" served as the focal point for the display.

This type of display has public relations value because it showed off the creative efforts of the pupils and demonstrated what the schools were doing

to promote independent reading. It also "accentuates the positive."

Concluding Remarks

An open door policy in the schools, community involvement, commitment of the parents and taking the offensive in public relations result in a better understanding of and feeling toward the schools. A valid and strong public relations program keeps education in the forefront. When it is time to order priorities, the public will be more willing to consider education favorably and have a more positive attitude toward helping the schools meet their legitimate needs.

"The love of study, a passion which derives great vigor from enjoyment, supplies each day, each hour, with a perpetual round of independent and rational pleasure."

Gibbon

Parents Guide Preschool Learning

by

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Most parents want what is best for their children. They aspire to have their children gain meaningful educational experiences. Parents sometimes doubt their own ability to help their children attain these goals. They question the effectiveness of their parenting skills and feel inadequate in a role as "teacher" of their children. Certainly, the parent is the child's first teacher. How can educators support parents in their role as teachers of their young children in a mutually satisfying manner?

Parents and educators can work together to share and utilize information necessary in developing and reinforcing child-learning and child-growth. Educators can facilitate and strengthen parental awareness of their capabilities to effectively contribute to their preschooler's acquisition of basic concepts, skills, and information. The Multi-Media Home Education Project successfully demonstrates a workable approach which benefits both parents and educators of preschool children.

Since September of 1974, utilizing a Title III, E.S.E.A. grant awarded to the Milwaukee Public Schools, the Multi-Media Home Education Project's staff has encouraged parents to take leadership roles in the implementation of learning activities for their preschool children within the context of their home. The project's staff recognizes and emphasizes the central importance of parents in the lives of their preschool children. Several delivery systems,

therefore, were designed in order to assist parents to expand and enrich the home learning environment. These models included a home visitation component and a Multi-Media component.

The home visitation model enabled staff members to meet with parents for weekly one hour sessions. Emphasis was placed upon staff training in order to demonstrate and utilize a variety of learning games, materials, and techniques to encourage effective parent involvement. These versatile staff members encouraged parents to become more sensitive to their child's abilities and learning needs. As staff members and parents discussed activities that children enjoy doing, parents were encouraged to feel that their viewpoints were important. During the weekly home visits, staff members demonstrated to parents a wide variety of ways to promote learning skills at home utilizing materials and resources readily available within their homes. Explicit recommendations were demonstrated and then made available to parents to assist them to recognize the importance of strengthening the self-confidence and the self-concept of their preschoolers. As parents became more aware of the impact of their direct and indirect actions upon their child's development, they used praise and positive reinforcement techniques to enhance and promote understandings of concepts and skills with their children. Appropriate activities were planned and shared with parents which provided ample opportunities for their children to acquire skills in a manner which assured individual success. Parents were bolstered in their feelings that their preschool children could learn from them and that as parents, they were capable of affecting the cognitive development of their youngsters.

In an attempt to reach more parents the Multi-Media component developed radio programs and instructional television programs which provided tips to enable parents to increase their parenting skills and to support their preschool child's learning activities. These multi-faceted programs were designed to contribute to the increased utilization of listening and language skills for preschool youngsters. While parents gained vital child development concepts, strategies, and knowledge, preschool children were encouraged to join in with stories, songs, and poetry in order to stretch their imaginations, creativity, and language skills.

Ninety (90) fifteen minute radio programs entitled "The Sound House" have been developed to stimulate listening and language skills of children three and one-half (3½) through five (5) years of age. These programs were broadcast three times weekly during the school year over the Milwaukee Public School station, WYMS-FM (88.9). The programs are scheduled for rebroadcast during the 1977-1978 school year. Once a week, a "Sound House Parent Guide" program was broadcast to share information concerning the program's activities and to increase parental knowledge through practical suggestions given by early childhood consultants and specialists.

In addition, a series of eight video-taped programs entitled "Tips For Today's Parents" was developed and shown at monthly parent meetings. Staff members and parents volunteered as participants in the video programs to illustrate a variety of effective early learning activities with preschool children. Demonstrated techniques and parental discussions promoted a greater understanding of how children learn, along with broadening parental knowledge of available child-rearing options. The programs challenged parents to assess and evaluate what is heard and what is seen in the films in light of individual parental insights. Parents perceived the consistency of child development along with the array of individual variations.

The Multi-Media Home Education Project has demonstrated that many of today's parents and educators eagerly work together in an effective and mutually supportive partnership to enrich the early learning experiences of preschool children. Evaluation data supports the conclusion that parents can be effective teachers of their children when provided with supportive resources. The sharing of effective parenting skills, however, must not be limited to a small segment of the community. Many students in secondary schools, for example, could benefit from this kind of information in order that they might be prepared for tomorrow's role as effective and understanding parents.

Assessing Language Readiness

by

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Primary grade teachers recognize the importance of helping children get off to a good start in beginning reading. Early in the first weeks of school, through use of a variety of formal and informal measures, the teacher searches for clues which will indicate a child's readinesses for reading instruction. Once a child's abilities are charted, an appropriate instructional sequence can be planned to lead the child toward success in reading. That success, however, may not be possible if the teacher fails to consider either of the major readiness skills.

For years researchers have tried to isolate skills, abilities and general circumstances that prepare a child for learning to read (Downing and Thackray, 1971). Through implementation of ideas gathered by readiness researchers, classroom teachers should be better able to identify children who need special consideration as they are exposed to reading. It is believed that a child's oral language skill is vital to his overall readiness. At the present time, however, educational research has not determined which of the myriad of language variables are most relevant to reading success. This study was designed to identify specific language variables that could prove to be useful as predictors of a child's success in beginning reading. Once identified and empirically tested, significant variables could be incorporated into a predictive instrument to be used by teachers in pre-reading screening programs.

It is common knowledge that children exhibit unique abilities in linguistic competency. Studies of emerging grammar have suggested that all children pass through similar stages as they acquire mature

language skill; however rate of growth within the expected sequence varies from child to child (Brown and Bellugi, 1964; Cazden, 1972; Chomsky, 1969; Dale, 1972; McNeill, 1970; and Menyuk, 1969). When children come to school, then, they exhibit an individual level of lexical, syntactic and semantic knowledge. We feel that children whose language development has been progressing slowly may experience difficulty in beginning reading programs unless special provisions are made.

Reading, when viewed as a psycholinguistic task, depends a great deal on a child's linguistic competency. Ruddell describes a communication model that can not operate without skill in language. He says that an "initial step in reading instruction is to help the child perceive letters and letter patterns and to understand that these units represent his familiar sound system . . . as a reader moves toward interpretation he begins to 'chunk' the words into larger units or phrases that are so common to his developed oral language system" (Ruddell, 1974, pp. 42-43). Goodman assumes that reading involves the reconstruction of an author's message. This reconstruction is accomplished as a reader samples the graphic stimuli, predicts structures based on knowledge of his own language, tests for meaningfulness and then accepts or rejects his hypothesis (Goodman, 1973, pp. 22-23). Finally, Smith (1971) believes that in reading, cognitive agents search for visual and nonvisual information in order to decode underlying meaning; as information accumulates, uncertainty is replaced by an understanding of the author's message. Linguistic input enters the processing system providing syntactic and semantic constraints which operate to aid in predicting and then testing possible meaning. The more syntactic or semantic information a reader can make use of, the less visual information is required.

In short, reading is a search for information; the goal of the search is to interpret meaning that has been coded in the graphic stimuli of a printed page. Since much of this search relies on linguistic skill, the reading task may be difficult for children who are progressing slowly en route to the acquisition of mature language.

Since reading is dependent on language ability it seems logical that we evaluate a child's linguistic capacity prior to planning for his

instruction in beginning reading. In the present study, a review of relevant research literature in language acquisition and reading culminated in the identification of several variables that appear to be promising indicators of linguistic maturity. The variables will be presented under three headings: morphology, syntax and vocabulary.

Morphology

"A speaker's ability to understand and form sentences depends to a large extent on his ability to understand and use morphemes' (Aurbach, 1968, p. 105). The combining of morphemes is a complex task which usually begins prior to age three (Cazden, 1972, p. 35); however, research evidence demonstrates that some primary school children are still struggling with certain rules (Gleason, 1971; Soloman, 1972). Since individual rates of growth in language ability are variable, one can not assume that all children are in command of the inflectional rule system when they enter first grade.

Control of the inflectional system appears to be one index of linguistic maturity that is related to success in learning to read (Brittain, 1970). Children who can apply the inflectional system should have the advantage of being better able to predict correct word forms as they read. On the other hand, a child who scores low on this variable may suffer comprehension problems. Inflections (taller, tallest) carry a unique language signal that must be acknowledged if an exact message is to be communicated. Future empirical study must 1) determine the child's level of acquisition of inflectional rules; and then, 2) test the child's ability to read and comprehend passages carefully designed to include a balanced presentation of our increasingly complex inflectional rule system.

Syntax

Research in child language has suggested that children develop basic syntactic patterns beyond the preschool era. Beginning readers depend on syntactic cues as they read (Weber, 1968). An awareness of underlying structure may serve as a guide to youngsters as they search for meaningful units while reading (Rode, 1974-75). Reading comprehension improves when children are given material written in familiar language patterns (Ruddell, 1965;

Tatham, 1970). These factors suggest that in an assessment of language readiness we should evaluate a child's level of syntactic development.

The T-unit has been used successfully as a means of segmenting language samples prior to linguistic analysis. A T-unit consists of "...one main clause with all subordinate clauses attached to it" (O'Connell et al, 1967, p. 23). Once child language samples are collected, T-units can be determined and examined. Mean Number of Words per T-unit has been a valuable indicator of maturity in terms of linguistic fluency (Fox, 1972; O'Donnell, et all, 1967). Children learn to use subordination for purposes of clarity when they speak; these embedded clausal structures add complexity to their language. Thus, computing a second syntactic variable, Ratio of Dependent Clause Length to Length of T-unit supplies yet another index of linguistic maturity (Loban, 1970). Complex or compound sentences produced by conjoining two or more basic sentences also increases the length and complexity of T-units. The Ratio of Sentence-Combining Transformations to T-units has been used by O'Donnell, et al (1967) and Bougere (1969) in measuring children's language ability. The three foregoing measures should provide evidence useful in evaluating a child's level of syntactic maturity. To determine the effect of syntactic maturity on a child's success in reading, the criterion measure of reading achievement must be designed to provide opportunities for the child to read passages which present ideas in increasingly complex sentence patterns.

Vocabulary

As a child's lexicon develops qualitative and quantitative changes have been noted (Cazden, 1972; Donaldson and Wales, 1970). New words are learned and old words take on additional meanings as the complex system of verbal categorization evolves.

A broad, inclusive vocabulary is a prerequisite to the successful reading of a passage (Weintraub, 1968, p. 70). Davis' research demonstrates the significant role of word meanings in comprehension (Smith and Johnson, 1976, p. 170). Children who exhibit strength in fluency and diversity of vocabulary have a better chance of comprehending a written message. Clearly, an evaluation of child language should include a measurement of vocabulary

development. Linguistic fluency can be determined, in part, by counting the total words in a language sample as has been demonstrated by Fox (1972). Useful measures of vocabulary diversity include 1) a simple count of the number of different words used; and 2) a controlled type-token ratio. The latter two measures reflect the complexity of a child's language.

As mentioned previously, the criterion measure of reading achievement will be an important consideration as we move on to the next portion of this study. Children must be given a reading test that allows them to make use of their knowledge of vocabulary. The instrument should be written to include diverse and complex vocabulary items that could be drawn from the child language samples collected in the study.

Summary

Children acquire language in a sequential manner but at a rate that is highly individual in nature. Since success in reading is partially dependent on a child's language ability, it is important that we determine a child's language readiness prior to initiating a program in beginning reading. This study outlined seven indices of linguistic maturity: the relationship between these language variables and reading success was suggested.

Conclusions

The conclusion of the present study was that seven language variables have possible predictive value in terms of success in beginning reading. A longitudinal study must now be planned that will seek answers to the following questions:

1. Is it possible to identify a level of skill in the application of rules governing inflectional morphology that correlates with success in reading at each of three primary grade levels (1, 2, and 3)?

2. Do three syntactic indices of linguistic maturity--Mean Length of T-unit, Ratio of Dependent Clause Length to Length of T-unit, and Ratio of Sentence-Combining Transformations to T-units--correlate with success in reading at each of three primary grade

levels (1, 2, and 3)?

3. Do three measures of fluency and complexity of vocabulary--Total Number of Words in Response, Number of Different Words, and a Type/Token Ratio--correlate with success in reading at each of three primary grade levels (1, 2, and 3)?

If empirical evidence suggests that any or all of these variables are correlated with reading success, the select variables could become the basis for development of a valid, reliable screening instrument to be used as part of the total readiness program at the pre-reading level.

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Working With Reading Problems

by

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"Your child is having trouble in reading." This message is sent to thousands of parents every year. Often it brings forth a response somewhat like panic. Parents know how important reading is in school and they are afraid the child will fail in all of his school work if he can't read.

What does it mean to have "trouble" reading? It may mean that the child is having a little difficulty in some areas of reading skill development. He may not be able to identify main ideas in what he is reading, or he may be having trouble with some vowel sounds. If the child is only having minor problems with reading he may simply need corrective instruction. This instruction is usually done in the classroom by the child's own teacher who is familiar with the child's reading development. Often just a little extra help enables the corrective reader to "catch up" in the skills he is lacking.

Some children may have trouble developing reading skills because they are slow learners. These children are not as intelligent as many of their classmates and may find that they cannot keep pace with the regular reading program. Only a trained psychologist can judge a child's intelligence. But if it has been determined that the child is a slow learner, he is best placed in an adapted program. In an adapted program the pace for developing skills is slower and the child is helped to achieve short-term goals at a comfortable rate. Often adapted instruction is able to be carried out in the regular classroom.

If the child has severe reading problems that require more intensive instruction than a corrective program can offer, and if the child's intelligence and emotional state lead to the belief that the child can learn to read, the child is best placed in a remedial situation. Remedial instruction requires a teacher who is specially trained in diagnosing reading problems and in working with disabled readers. At times the child's classroom teacher may be able to handle this assignment. The teacher must have time t assess the child's needs, plan an individualized program of reading development, and work with the child in small groups or individually. Keeping the child in the classroom has several advantages. The child remains with his peers and is not set apart as "different". One person guides his reading development and can carry over this instruction into other subject areas. It is also less of an economic drain on the school system if a separate reading specialist does not have to be hired. But there are also disadvantages. The classroom teacher may not have the expertise in reading to make a skilled diagnosis. In addition, he or she may not have the time to plan and carry out an intensive individual program for the child.

Many school systems do have specially trained reading teachers. These specialists work with small groups of children, usually meeting with each child for two or three hours a week. Usually this remedial instruction is in addition to the child's reading program in the classroom. The remedial reading teacher is a highly trained specialist who has the skills to diagnose the child's strengths and weaknesses and the time to design and carry out a program developed especially for that child. This may seem like the best solution to the problem of working with remedial readers. But hiring a teacher to work with small numbers of children is expensive. Finding a suitable room in which the teacher may work is often a problem in overcrowded schools. In addition, there is a risk that the child may feel embarrassed to be singled out to go "there" three times a week. The school has the responsibility for planning a program to meet the needs of any child who is reading below his ability level. A recent Wisconsin law requires that a district must have a reading specialist for at least kindergarten through third grade. But parents also have a responsibility when their child has problems in learning to read. Their job is

not to teach reading to the child but to provide a supportive environment in which the child knows that he is a success at home even if he has some problems in reading at school. If the parents are embarrassed by the child's problems or are convinced that the child is "stupid," the child will reflect these attitudes. Sometimes parents are unrealistic in their expectations. A frank discussion with the child's teacher may help parents to see the child's problems more realistically. The teacher may show the parents what "the average" third grader is reading and how their child is still having trouble with some of the skills necessary to read at that level. The teacher may be able to provide some reinforcement activities that parents can help the child with at home. These activities should be short and should be a follow-up to a skill the teacher has already introduced. The teacher may be able to suggest some reading games the child and the parents may enjoy playing. Whenever a parent is working with his child the atmosphere should be relaxed and supportive. As soon as either the parent or the child begins to feel frustration or anger, the home activity should be stopped. Forcing a child to continue "until he gets it right" only creates a dislike of reading in the child. As a change of pace the parent might read to the child. Many children's books are delightful and can be enjoyed by parents as well as children. But having the child stumble through reading a difficult book out loud to himself is delightful to neither the reader nor the listener!

"Your child is having a reading problem" does not doom the child to lifelong illiteracy. In most cases a carefully planned course of reading instruction can help the child develop the necessary skills to become a successful reader. This often takes time and parents should not expect instant success, but with support both at home and at school most children can overcome their reading problems.

Editor's Note: Dr. Spiegel was employed by the Madison Public Schools when this article was written.

The Teaching of Reading Readiness And Reading In The Public School Kindergartens Of Wisconsin

by

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There have always been activities in the kindergarten curriculum that have developed reading readiness or reading skills and abilities either directly or indirectly. Unfortunately, kindergarten teachers have not always been aware that such activities were related to the reading process. Within recent years, for example, many of the problems referred to the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction having to do with kindergarten have been related to some aspect of teaching reading. Continued analysis of these problems revealed that in many cases they have apparently arisen because of uncertainties on the part of kindergarten teachers about reading readiness and reading and how they relate to one another and to the young children of kindergarten age.

Part of the present concern about reading and reading related activities on the part of kindergarten teachers in Wisconsin appears to come from at least three sources. First, because of the current emphasis on accountability and the intellectual development of young children, the majority of kindergarten teachers in Wisconsin are now being called upon to give evidence that reading experiences, broadly defined, are a part of their curriculum. Second, Wisconsin did not require kindergarten teachers to have special training in the teaching of reading in order to be certified prior to July 1, 1975. Third, there is no state curricular guide for reading and the state kindergarten guide deals with

reading very superficially. Therefore, to determine the status of reading readiness and reading instruction in kindergarten programs of Wisconsin, the Department of Public Instruction conducted a survey of the public school kindergarten teachers regarding the reading readiness and reading programs offered in their classroom.

The Problem

The purposes of this investigation were: (1) to describe the reading readiness and reading programs in the public school kindergartens of Wisconsin, and (2) to determine the relationships between selected teacher variables and the elements of kindergarten reading programs. In specific terms, the study sought to achieve the following objectives:

1. To elicit demographic and classroom information from Wisconsin public school kindergarten teachers.

2. To determine the nature of reading readiness programs in Wisconsin public school kindergartens.

3. To determine the nature of reading programs in Wisconsin public school kindergartens.

4. To compare kindergarten teachers, categorized by selected variables, on selected aspects of the reading programs they provide their students.

Instrumentation

To obtain information related to the objectives, data were collected through the use of a thirty-item questionnaire entitled, "Survey on Reading Readiness and Reading Programs in the Kindergarten." In the fall of 1976 the questionnaire, designed to elicit information about teacher characteristics and instructional programs in reading readiness and reading, was sent to 1,657 kindergarten teachers employed by 390 of the 421 public school districts in Wisconsin operating elementary grades. Sixty-one percent, or 1,001, of the questionnaires were returned.

Results and Implications

This study was designed to describe the reading readiness and reading programs in the public school kindergartens of Wisconsin and to determine the relationships between selected teacher variables and the elements of kindergarten reading programs. The results which emanated from this undertaking are too numerous to elaborate in this article, therefore only those which suggest certain conclusions and have implications for curriculum development and teacher education will be discussed.

Curriculum Development. To learn if reading readiness and reading were a part of the curriculum, the kindergarten teacher was asked to indicate (1) if reading readiness and/or reading were a part of the curriculum; (2) if a specific kind of reading curriculum was required by their school; and (3) if particular types of reading programs were provided in their classroom. The data revealed that reading readiness was a part of the kindergarten curriculum in a majority (98%) of the classrooms and reading instruction was provided in a third (38%) of the classrooms. Various aspects of these programs were also described.

When the subjects were asked what specific kindergarten curriculum was required by their schools, 60 percent indicated that the school required informal reading readiness, 52 percent formal reading readiness, 18 percent formal instruction beyond reading readiness, 44 percent the use of readiness kits, 36 percent the use of readiness workbooks, 18 percent used the Wisconsin Design, and 12 percent indicated none.

It was also concluded that nearly all kindergarten programs begin early in the year, including 20-30 minutes of reading readiness or reading each day. The reading readiness programs were mainly total-group instruction, with a great dependence on commercial materials for curriculum content and with little consideration given to individual pupil needs.

When asked which approach was used for formal reading instruction, the responses indicated that the experience chart approach was used most, then the language experience approach, and third, the individualized reading approach.

What was included in the kindergarten reading curriculum was primarily the decision of the teacher. Therefore, there is a need for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to give direction as to what should be included in the kindergarten curriculum in regard to diagnosis and evaluation procedures, materials and activities to be provided, and skills to be taught in reading readiness and reading.

Teacher Education. The data for this study indicated that it is primarily the kindergarten teacher (1) who decides that reading readiness and reading will be a part of the curriculum; (2) who selects the program elements; (3) who actually teaches reading readiness and reading; and (4) who uses his/her own observation to provide diagnostic and evaluative information. When comparing kindergarten teachers, it was found that there were statistically significant differences ($p > .01$) between the expected and observed frequencies (proportions) of kindergarten teachers categorized by years of kindergarten teaching experience, the number of courses taken in the teaching of reading, and the year of the last course in the teaching of reading in their use of diagnostic procedures, evaluation procedures, materials, activities, language skills, conceptual skills, visual skills, auditory skills and kinetic skills. Therefore, the area which has the greatest implications for program improvement is preservice and inservice teacher education.

Beginning July 1, 1975, to be certified to teach in Wisconsin, all prospective elementary (including kindergarten) and middle school teachers must satisfactorily complete at least one discrete course in the teaching of reading. The data from this study indicated that the average kindergarten teacher teaching in the 1974-1975 school year completed the requirements for kindergarten certification around 1965.

With regard to the kindergarten teachers' training in the teaching of reading, 24 percent of the kindergarten teachers had no course in the teaching of reading, 15 percent had one course, 22 percent had two courses, and 39 percent had three or more.

The respondents were also asked to indicate the year they took their last course in the teaching of

reading. The data indicated that 61 percent of the respondents had their last course in the teaching of reading before 1971, indicating that the majority of kindergarten teachers in Wisconsin may not be aware of current practices in the teaching of reading and are in need of inservice training in this area. The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction therefore should encourage teacher education institutions and local education agencies to develop inservice courses in the teaching of reading for kindergarten teachers.

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings, at least two conclusions seemed warranted. First, there appeared to be a need for the Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction to provide school districts, administrators and teachers with increasing guidance regarding the nature and nurture of reading readiness and reading instruction in the kindergarten. Second, many public school kindergarten teachers in Wisconsin would benefit from exposure to current information about teaching reading through improved preservice and inservice teacher education programs.

However, curriculum development and preservice/inservice teacher education cannot be carried out by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction alone. Reading consultants, university professors and parents can assist in this undertaking and be involved in the public school reading program.

Editor's Note

This complete study and data are available at the Department of Public Instruction. Contact:

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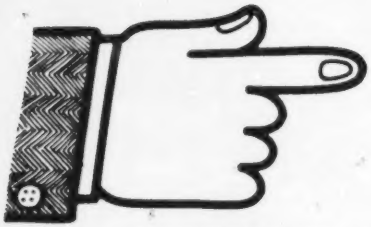

Guest Editorial

WHY CAN'T THEM GRADUATES READ?

by

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The other day a parent called about a high school student who was having trouble in social studies because of his reading.

> "Jeff never did read too good. He's just like his father. He never got through high school either. I just want Jeff to get through school and learn how to read well enough to get along in life. What can we do?"

The next day a father called about his daughter.

> "I'm a businessman, and I see what it's like out here. Kids graduate from high school can't even spell. My daughter, Kim, can't even write me a note without misspelling half the words. How is she ever going to make it in college?"

Of course we do everything we can for Kim and Jeff. We test and provide instructional programs and individual tutors to meet their needs. We are certain that when they graduate they have had the best we have to offer. But how can we let the parents know that we have tried? And how can we assure parents that, whereas every student will not achieve the same, every student will have had an equal opportunity to learn?

Parents of high school students today seem to be confused. The most vocal cries for back to basics

come from parents who are educated business and professional people who value verbal skills. Their children tend to be the most highly skilled, and will be the most likely to do well on any test of basic skills we give them. The unfortunate child of one of these parents who is not highly skilled is put through no end of tests and remedial instruction for the sin of being "merely normal." In asking for basic skills these parents seem to be really asking for highly advanced verbal skills; the ability to write college-level papers with perfect spelling, punctuation, and usage; the ability to read and comprehend technical material; the ability to reason and speak coherently.

It is ironic that the parents of those students who will most likely fail the tests of basic skills, working class parents who are not well educated, tend to be the least likely to demand basic skills testing and training. They are much more concerned for their child's individual progress. They are pleased if their children can get through school without dropping out, taking drugs, getting pregnant, or running away from home. They want an education that will help their children cope with a complex society. Their idea of the basic skills is quite different from that of the other parents.

The current movement toward minimum competency standards for high school graduation is disturbing. The premise of such standards is that they will satisfy the concern of parents for the basic skills. Students who pass these competencies will supposedly demonstrate that they can read, write, and compute well enough to read newspapers, fill in job applications and make change. Those who don't will get remedial work designed to help them pass the competencies sometime before they graduate, or they won't graduate. It's a popular idea. To date, sixteen states have mandated districts to set minimum competency standards, and dozens of cities in the nation have set their own. Milwaukee, for example, has determined that all 1978 graduates will be required to pass an 8th grade reading proficiency test. Passing means responding correctly to 34 or more items or scoring above the 23rd percentile rank on the Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK), Reading Subtest Level I. Sparta is now in the process of identifying minimum competencies for graduation. These districts hope that by setting minimum

competencies they will make the high school diploma mean something.

But it won't work. Merely setting minimum competency standards and sitting back to wait for a "new, improved product" from our schools is not realistic. The basic problem is the definition of a minimum competency. If it is a task that is too easy or irrelevant, then schools will continue to graduate students who can't read or write. The "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval" conferred by the minimum competency tests will be a sham and it won't take employers long to find this out. This will be equally true if remediation is seen merely as a cram course in how to pass the test. Such knowledge rarely lasts beyond the test day or transfers to real life situations.

But if the tests are too hard, if they demand all students to perform at a specified high level, then too many will fail. A new tracking system, based on test scores, will be created, de facto, similar to the 11+ system that England just eliminated. School systems will have to be willing to commit millions of dollars to remedial programs. The large numbers who fail will turn bitter. Many will drop out. Others will sue. And some will turn to cheating or commercial cram courses.

Lest you think I am merely exaggerating, I have spoken with teachers from Phoenix, Denver, New York, and Gary who say that all of these things happen. In Gary, Indiana over 400 students in one high school failed the test the first time they took it. This number was reduced to 50 by their senior year through various means. The teachers say that ultimately everybody who tries graduates despite minimum competencies. Students who still read at fourth grade level are somehow helped to pass the tests. The few who do not graduate were usually failing for some other reason.

So how can we answer parents and a public that demands competency from our students? The answer lies in what we communicate to parents and how we communicate it. Parents and students, deserve to know a great deal more about the students abilities. The method of criterion level testing used by most minimum competency tests deserves to be looked at. Such tests define a domain of knowledge and the

acceptable level of mastery. This is much better than norm-referenced tests, such as Milwaukee is using, which give grade levels or percentiles that are based on how other students score, and not how much the student himself knows. Criterion-referenced tests force the schools to determine what it is that the students need to know (their goals for students) and what level is acceptable (their criteria).

But criterion-referenced tests should not be used to set minimum standards. Instead they should be used to diagnose student abilities. The results should be made known to the student and the parents through conferences with teachers or counselors. Where the student is weak, remedial action in the form of tutoring or elective courses needs to be spelled out. No student should be forced into remedial courses that turn out to be cram courses. Students should choose remedial courses if they think they will help them to learn. Students should be offered opportunities to retake the tests in order to measure improvement. Upon graduation the student should receive a list of the competencies that he or she has passed.

The advantages to this use of criterion-referenced tests are several. First, the tests can act as a motivating factor. Failing a minimum competency test can be discouraging. But with criterion-referenced tests the students and the parents can sit down and discuss the results and recommendations and see how they fit in with the student's interests and future plans. Because graduation does not depend on them, criteria can be set as low or high as the school feels necessary in defining essential skills. There is no danger of the minimum required becoming the maximum the students will perform. And most important, students will make real improvement in basic skills, rather than artificial gains which come through cram courses and teaching to the test.

Will the schools go on producing students who can't read, write, or make change? Probably, although this situation is bound to improve simply because of the tremendous amount of attention being paid to it by parents, schools, and the media. But that is not the question being put to the schools by the parents mentioned earlier in this article. The business man wants to know what the schools will do

to achieve the highest potential for Kim. He will hardly be satisfied with the minimum. The mother, on the other hand, just wants Jeff to get through high school. She does not want him to be discouraged by a lot of tests, frustrated by failure, and shunted into "dummy" classes. She knows he wouldn't pass every competency, but she would be proud of him for every one he did pass.

Both parents really just want to know how their children are doing in school. They get frustrated when they can't find out. When the school fails to communicate with them about students' progress then the parents turn to simple solutions. Simple solutions like minimum competencies. Only by offering a comprehensive program of student goals, criterion referenced assessment of student skills, good communication with the parents, and effective remedial programs can we hope to graduate competent adults.

WISCONSIN STATE READING ASSOCIATION

Nominations for 1978-79

The Nominating Committee has started the wheels rolling for the Spring 1978 WSRA election of officers. All Local Executive Boards are asked to review their memberships and suggest possible candidates for WSRA offices. Please determine if the proposed candidate is willing to serve before submitting his/her name. Mail your suggested lists of candidates to:

Suzanne M. Felan,
Nominating Committee
11322 W. National Ave. #202
West Allis, Wisconsin 53227